



# Montgomery County Council

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*For Immediate Release*

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## **Montgomery Council Recommends 2 Reversible Lanes for I-270 Expansion, Light Rail for CCT, Lower Tolls for ICC**

*Moves Continue County's Efforts Toward Increased Mobility*

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ROCKVILLE, Md., November 17, 2009—The Montgomery County Council today continued its efforts to improve transportation in the County by recommending to the Maryland State Highway Administration and the State Department of Transportation that I-270 be expanded with two reversible lanes and that light rail be used as the mode of transportation for the proposed Corridor Cities Transitway that would extend from the Shady Grove Metro Station to Clarksburg. The Council also recommended that toll charges for the Intercounty Connector, which is being built to link I-270 to I-95 in Laurel, should be lower than the state has proposed, with volume users receiving discounts.

The Council unanimously approved an approach proposed by Council President Phil Andrews, and recommended by the Council's Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee, that would have two lanes of I-270 built as reversible High Occupancy Vehicle Toll Lanes (HOV Toll) with tolls varying by levels of congestion. [Existing lanes would continue without tolls.] State traffic projections show that two reversible lanes—south-bound in the morning and north-bound for peak evening hours—would be sufficient to handle future traffic on I-270.

“Building two reversible lanes rather than four regular lanes would save hundreds of millions of dollars and reduce environmental and community impacts,” said Council President Andrews.

Car pool users, buses and motorcyclists would have free use of the toll lanes. The tolls would vary depending on the level of congestion to ensure that the lanes moved at a reasonable speed. The Council limited its recommendations to within the County, but the state likely will consider the recommendation in considering expansion the full length of I-270 to Frederick.

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The recommendation in regard to light rail for the Corridor Cities Transitway was 6-3, with Councilmembers Valerie Ervin, Nancy Floreen, Mike Knapp, George Leventhal, Nancy Navarro and Duchy Trachtenberg in favor of the light rail option. Council President Andrews, Vice President Roger Berliner and Councilmember Marc Elrich preferred the less-expensive option of dedicated Bus Rapid Transit lines.

The Council by an 8-1 vote recommended an alignment for the CCT that would be closer to the Kentlands community and the proposed future communities at Crown Farm and Gaithersburg West. Council President Andrews voted against the recommendation because the Council has yet to take action on the scope of the proposed major expansion of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan and the proposed Life Sciences Center that is part of the plan. He indicated support for the realignment regarding the Kentlands and Crown Farm that are in the City of Gaithersburg and not within the pending Gaithersburg West Master Plan.

The Intercounty Connector is an 18-mile highway that is currently under construction. The state has proposed toll rates between 25 cents to 35 cents per mile during peak periods for automobiles and two-axle trucks, with charges of approximately 20 to 30 cents per mile in off-peak periods. The rates would climb steadily for vehicles of three axles or more, with a top rate of \$1.88 to \$2.63 per mile during peak periods for the largest vehicles. The minimum toll on a three-mile trip for automobiles during peak trips would be approximately 75 cents to \$1.05 and during non-peak times approximately 60 to 90 cents.

The Council said today that those proposed rates—which range from \$8.80 to \$12.30 per day for rush hour roundtrips by automobiles—would discourage use of the highway and reduce the amount of traffic that the ICC would take off congested local roads. It recommended to the state that the tolls should be lower than proposed and rather than implementing the full toll structure when the road is opened, the Council recommended phasing in the rates gradually. The Council recommended offering a discount for volume users of the road (as is the case with other toll facilities in Maryland). It also recommended setting the tolls so that a vehicle getting on or off at either Georgia Avenue or nearby Layhill Road will pay the same. This recommendation was made as to not encourage an overload of traffic in the Longmead Crossing community.

Earlier this year, the Council unanimously endorsed light rail for the proposed east-west Purple Line that would connect the Bethesda and New Carrollton Metro stations.

“This year, the Council has unanimously recommended three landmark transportation projects—the expansion of I-270, the construction of the Corridor Cities Transitway and the Purple Line—to provide traffic relief for our constituents,” said Council President Andrews. “Now, these projects require state and federal backing to get off the drawing board and provide congestion relief to our residents.”

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